

Fire — a Long-Lost Partner

Have you ever accused anyone of something only to discover later that you were wrong? In parks and forests nationwide, we have learned that a accused vandal is actually an important partner. That partner is fire. Years ago, we tried to banish fire from the landscape because we believed it was destructive. In sequoia groves, that meant putting out lightning-caused fires that naturally start as frequently as every 5 to 15 years.

As time passed, we saw unanticipated consequences for park resources. It turned out that fire suppression blocked important ecological processes and caused many problems. Two stand out:

First, sequoias were not reproducing. We learned that fires are critical to sequoia regeneration. They create an ash seedbed and open the forest canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the seedlings.



Fire in the Sierra usually hugs the ground. Its low flames clear dangerous built-up fuels that would otherwise feed intense wildfires. Occasional hot spots leave openings in the forest that are ecologically important — that is where sequoia trees regenerate.

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Second, a vast accumulation of dead wood and small, dense white fir trees now increase wildland fire hazards. Natural fires used to burn away these excess fuels. Now, after fire's long absence, these fuels cause bigger blazes that are more dangerous for people, plants, and wildlife. They burn hotter and are harder to put out.

To protect human safety and benefit giant sequoia trees, the National Park Service has taken steps to end this misunderstanding about fire. For over 30 years at Sequoia and Kings Canyon, we have studied fire and its effects on the land. When and where it's appropriate, we ignite prescribed fires and allow lightning-caused fires to spread naturally to improve resource conditions.

We see strong evidence that working with this powerful natural partner is better than resisting it — we are reducing fuels and stimulating sequoia growth with the help of fire.

Why is this important? The National Park System exists to conserve resources "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Early rangers thought that aggressive fire suppression met this goal. A more complete understanding of fire tells us that excluding this important natural partner only hurts what we are trying to protect.

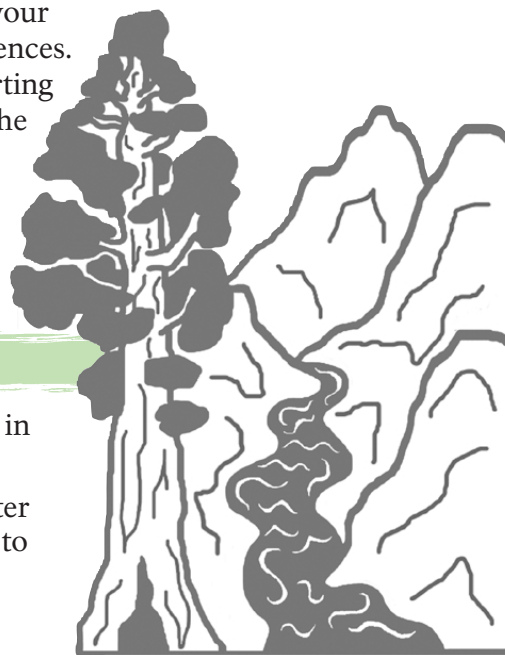
HELP US HELP THE PARKS! THE SEQUOIA NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Does the sight of a majestic sequoia or the dramatic Kings Canyon take your breath away? Then join an organization that helps to preserve these experiences. The non-profit Sequoia Natural History Association is dedicated to supporting the parks, enriching *your* experience, and promoting public awareness of the significance of national parks.

SNHA is the primary partner in funding park education and research programs, and helping to support exhibits, ranger programs, and bear protection. The association also operates the bookstores in the visitor centers, Crystal Cave tours, and the Sequoia Field Institute education programs.

MEMBER BENEFITS

- 15% off everything sold in park visitor centers, at Lake Kaweah Visitor Center, the Sierra Nature Store in Visalia, and from the website.
- 10-20% off books at most other national park visitor centers.
- Half-price tickets on regular Crystal Cave tours and a reduced fee on special tours (see page 3).
- Internet access for \$13.95 /month, unlimited. No contract or sign-up fee.
- Discounts at selected hotels in Three Rivers.
- Biannual members' newsletter and copies of this Guide mailed to you seasonally.
- An invitation to the annual members' picnic in the sequoias.
- Discounts on Sequoia Field Institute programs.
- The knowledge that you are helping your national parks!



Sequoia Natural History Association
www.sequoiahistory.org
559-565-3759

The Sequoia Fund

Another non-profit group comes to the rescue when limited funds put important park projects on hold.

Beetle Rock, in the Giant Forest, is a great example. This historic building was slated for destruction. Instead, the Sequoia Fund continues to raise money to remake it into a unique classroom facility. As the new Beetle Rock Education Center, it houses the Sequoia Field Institute, which offers outstanding seminars, workshops, and field trips to researchers, school groups, and YOU! Now the Sequoia Fund needs your help to finish the classrooms and make the Education Center complete.

The Fund's efforts on behalf of these parks are numerous: bear-proof food-storage boxes, Junior Ranger programs, research on the threatened Sierra bighorn sheep, habitat restoration, and trail repair. Help turn important goals into reality — contact The Sequoia Fund: 559-739-1668, www.sequoiafund.org.

WILDERNESS OVERNIGHTS

To preserve the wilderness environment and experience, each park trail has a daily entry quota for overnight trips. A permit is required for each party (including those traveling solo). Permits are not required for park day hikes or for overnights in the Monarch and Jennie Lakes wildernesses in the national forest.

Get your permit at the park ranger station nearest your trailhead (see pages 5 & 7). There is a backcountry camping fee of \$15 for each party.

First-come, first-served permits can be issued the morning of your trip or after 1pm the day before. If the quota for your desired trail is full, you can choose another trail or another day to start.

Reserved permits must be picked up between the afternoon before and 9am on your day of departure. If delayed, call the ranger station or you may forfeit your reservation.

Permits are not issued late in the day as minimum distances must be reached before you camp. Camping in the park's "frontcountry" is permitted only in campgrounds; camping or sleeping in vehicles is not allowed in parking lots, pull-outs, picnic areas, or trailheads in the park.

Requests to reserve a trail entry date are accepted starting March 1 and at least 3 weeks before your trip's start date:

Wilderness Permit Reservations
Sequoia & Kings Canyon N.P.
HCR 89 Box 60
Three Rivers, CA 93271
1-559-565-3766; Fax 559-565-4239

Get a copy of *Backcountry Basics* at visitor centers or by mail for free details on wilderness, or see www.nps.gov/seki/bcinfo.htm.

BACKCOUNTRY LODGES

- **PEAR LAKE SKI HUT (SNHA)**
Reservations required:
1-559-565-3759
www.sequoiahistory.org
Open December to April. This cabin is a beautiful, strenuous 6-mile ski into the wilderness.
- **BEARPAW MEADOW CAMP (DNCPR)** www.visitsequoia.com
Reservations required:
1-888-252-5757. Open mid-June through September 11, weather permitting. A tent hotel at 7800' on the High Sierra Trail, an 11-mile hike from Giant Forest.